

New outlaws brace for onslaught aimed at fringe of society

Duncan Campbell examines the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, while Vivek Chaudhary looks at some of the activities that the bill aims to ban

PERHAPS the most hideous time in some areas, " said Lady Oleg Maitland, Conservative MP for Sutton and Cheam, as she expressed her anger over the delay in the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill this summer. "The public has a right to expect proper action to be taken now."

Action, whether the public deems it proper or not, is due to be taken when the bill reappears in the Commons in October — after the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, has confirmed in July that it would be delayed to allow a series of debates in the House to be reversed.

People who live on what are seen as the edges of society believe that once the bill becomes law they will indeed be in for a "hideous time".

Certain clauses are aimed at people — squatters, ravers, new-age travellers, hunt saboteurs, and demonstrators — whose very mention at a Tory party conference can raise a "no-hiss" response to a noise level that would, under the bill, constitute a new offence.

Effectively, the key clauses aimed at these groups are:

Gathering: Clauses 65, 66: empower local councils, on application by the chief constable and with the Home Secretary's permission, to ban gatherings of more than 20 people on a

police or face arrest. The number of vehicles is now reduced to six and the trespass clauses is removed so that those originally allowed on to the land legally can be removed.

A local authority's duty to provide sites for a limited number of travellers is abolished.

Hunt saboteure: Clause 63: makes it an offence for a tree-trespasser on a highway — provided it is not a surfaced road — to attempt to disrupt or obstruct an activity taking place in the open air.

Squatting: Clauses 67, 68 and 69: give additional power for anyone authorised by a property's owner to make forced entry. A squatter refusing to leave immediately could face a prison sentence.

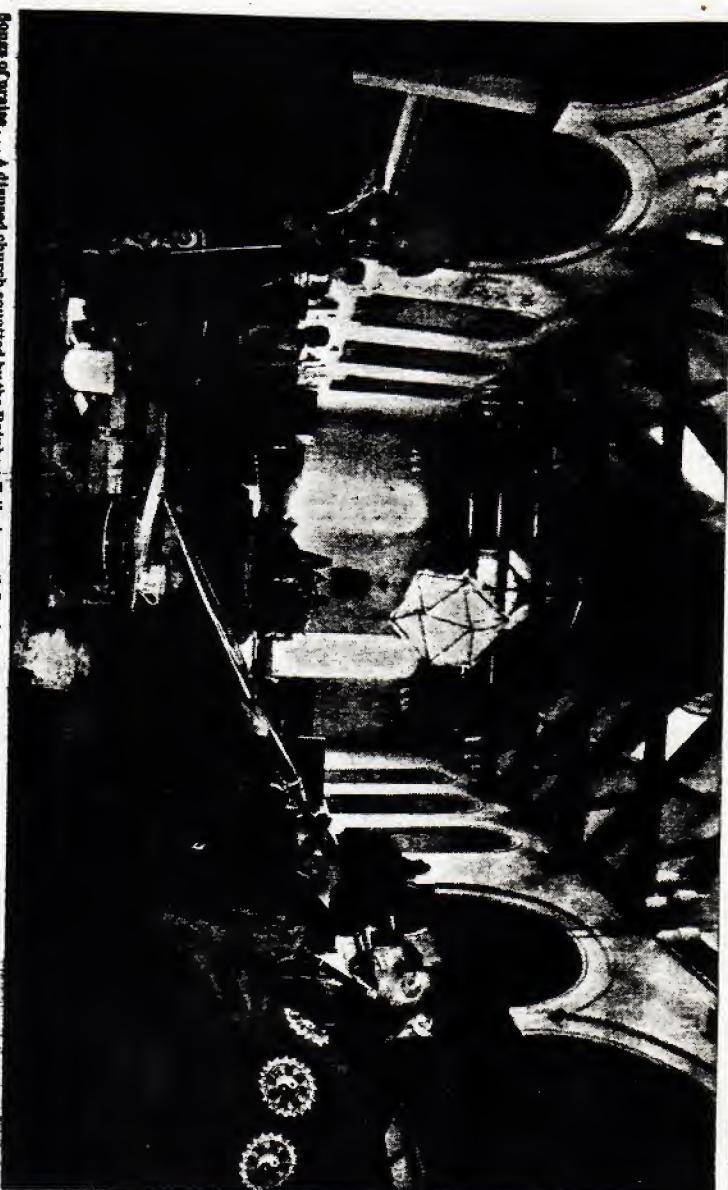
Stop and search: Clause 55: enables a police officer of Inspector rank or above who believes that "incidents of serious violence may take place in any locality" to authorise stop and search of persons and vehicles.

Resistance: to the above clauses was slow to develop. Neither the main opposition parties nor the trade unions

have taken part in public debate. The Opposition has since come

Home is where the heart is... The Observer

Groups of people... A disused church squat in north London offers an advice centre and 24-hour cafe



PHOTOGRAPH: GREGORY LAMBERT

The DIY culture stands united on home front

The squatters

LESS THAN two months ago it was just another home to an eclectic collection of teenagers, students, musicians, and eco-activists. The squat was "busted" open (squatters' terminology for entering a building) three weeks ago. Within hours, a legal notice on the front door warned the authorities that they need a court order for eviction.

Under the Criminal Justice Bill, the notice will be about as useful as the author sign on the front of the building in Kentish Town, north London, giving the opening times of the former Department of Health and Social Security office.

Once the bill becomes law, squatters will be evicted within 24 hours, and most of the 25 re-

"I'm good with my hands and have got tools. I've been doing as much work as I can," Christine Slattery, aged 27, a former journalist, is one of 60 squatters trying to get legal authority funding for the squat. The eventual aim is to try to set up a centre for homeless people.

With a blanket wrapped around her to keep warm, she spends her days working on a computer in her normally-kop room, writing letters to the London borough of Camden outlining their plans. They have been told that the borough intends to evict them, but remain optimistic.

"We hope to carry on, but I despair when I think about the Criminal Justice Bill," she said. "Where would all these people have gone if the bill had been in effect?"

"There is not enough accommodation as it is. The bill is just going to push people on to the streets."

"We hope to carry on, but I despair when I think about the criminal justice bill. Where would all the people have gone if it had been in effect? There are not enough homes as it is. The bill is just going to push people on to the streets."

highway or any land without the owner's permission. It will be an offence to take part in such a gathering or to incite another to do so.

Police can turn back anyone within five miles of a place subject to a banishing order.

Gatherings with music:

Clauses 38, 39, known as the "rave" clause, can apply to any form of gathering at which music is played. It has drawn

attention because of the harassing of references to the types of music proscribed, such as those "wholly or predominantly charac-

terised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats."

The music must be played at night, be likely to cause "severe" distress to the inhabitants of the locality and on land at least partly open to the air".

If a police officer of superintendent rank or above believes

that such an event may take

place, all those present may be required to leave and, if they fail to do so, can be arrested.

People living in vehicles:

Clauses 56, 72, 73, 74, 75, an ex-

emption of the 1986 Public Order Act, which requires people who

trespass with 12 vehicles or

more or who damage property

to leave when requested by

the owner or his agent, may be

subject to a fine of £1,000.

mainly from a loose alliance of groups including the civil liberties group Liberty, the Attar-

tee, Charter 88, the Socialist

Workers Party, the ravers

rising Exodus Collective, the

squatters group Squash, Road

Alert, a group opposed to road

building, an anarchist and

regional ad hoc groups, and the

Freedom Network, which pro-

vides information for groups

opposed to the bill.

Some of the most vociferous

criticism has come from the

Lords, where the Bishop of Livo-

pool, David Sheppard, said of

the travellers' clause: "A civi-

lised country is properly mea-

sured by how it treats its mi-

norities — and particularly

minorities who ... may have

attracted unpopularity."

Liz Parratt, said yesterday:

"Once the bill becomes law,

Liberty will seek to challenge

many of its provisions in the

European Court of Human

Rights, draw attention to them

when the UN Human Rights

committee reviews the UK Gov-

ernment's human rights record

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